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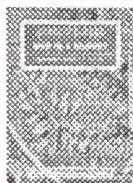
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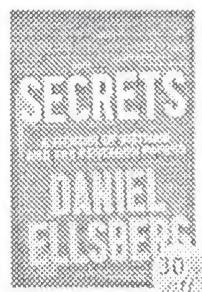
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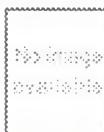
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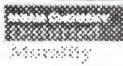
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From Publishers Weekly

Ellsberg's transformation from cold warrior and Defense Department analyst to impassioned antiwar crusader who released the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times in June 1971 makes a remarkable and riveting story that still shocks 30 years later. Avoiding, for the most part, self-justification and self-aggrandizement, he clearly relates the experiences that led him to reject as arrogant lies the premises six presidents presented to the public and Congress to secure support for the Vietnam War. He describes the

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disjunction between what he saw during visits to Vietnam in the early and mid-'60s, driving through dangerous Viet Cong-held territory, and what was told to the press and public. And he recalls his first reading of the classified documents later known as the Pentagon Papers, which exposed the motives, in his view unprincipled, behind American involvement in Vietnam. Ellsberg creates page-turning human drama and suspense in both his descriptions of his early experience accompanying U.S. combat missions in Vietnam and his days spent underground evading an FBI manhunt after the Times's publication of the Papers. Another strength of this memoir is Ellsberg's vivid recollections of meetings with prominent policymakers, from Henry Kissinger to Senator William Fulbright, that re-create the deep tensions of the Vietnam era. Ellsberg raises serious ethical questions about how citizens, politicians, the press and officials act when confronted with government actions they consider immoral and perhaps illegal. Ellsberg's own answer is history.

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From Library Journal

Before leaking the Pentagon Papers, which documented U.S. foreign-policy failures and deceit in Vietnam from 1945 to 1968, Ellsberg was a gung-ho advisor to the State and Defense departments. One fascinating part of this story is his growing disenchantment with the war during these years. He came to believe that leaking the top-secret papers and other classified documents was a patriotic act that could help end the war. Other fascinating aspects of this account include Ellsberg's frustrated... [»read more](#)

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Understanding Hidden American History, February 7, 2003

Reviewer: **Robert B. Algie** from Rockford, IL USA

Like many others I was sucked into the Vietnam war against my will. I paid for what I thought was LBJ's war with my blood and sanity. What "SECRETS" does is to fill in the blanks with the background of the political agendas of a number of presidential administrations. "SECRETS" validates suspicions some of us have had for more than thirty years. "SECRETS" is the memoir of one person, Daniel Ellsberg, who took a stand on the side of humanity and morality in an effort to end the Vietnam war and topple the corrupt and insatiable desire for ultimate power that would have been Richard M. Nixon's had it not been for the release of the Pentagon Papers.

"SECRETS" is a story of patriotism at its finest, where

one man risked everything in an effort to disclose the truth about power and war conducted by the United States Government. Reading "SECRETS" exposes war for what it really is, a manipulative tool of big business and government order.

If more Americans would read this book they would become aware enough to argue whether or not we should ever engage in the brutality and ignorance of war again.

"SECRETS" should be required reading for anyone in America who believes him/herself to be a patriot.

Bob Algie

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 **Spellbinding Recounting Of The Pentagon Papers Story!**, October 10, 2002

TOP 10 Reviewer: Barron Laycock (Labradorman) (see more reviews about me) from Temple, NH USA

After finding this book quite by accident while browsing through the wonderful Concord bookstore the other day, I was astounded to find how relevant and interesting a story author Daniel Ellsberg manages to conjure up after all this time regarding his legendary experience leading up to and including the leaking, release and publication of the infamous "Pentagon Papers" by the New York Times. As he explains early in the long yet fascinating monologue, he fully expected to be sentenced to a long prison sentence for having secreted a copy of the highly classified Department of Defense's official history of the American Government's policy and involvement in Vietnam. The report was a damning confirmation of the worst fears of the anti-war movement, and provided overwhelming evidence of the cynical, manipulative, and deceitful character of our government and its deceit to its own people regarding its involvement.

What surprised Ellsberg most in all of this swirling excitement and activity was his own growing celebrity, and while he spent years fearing the worst for his own admitted culpability in defying criminal statutes by stealing and leaking official government secrets, eventually the charges against him were dropped based, among other things, on the revelations of the Nixon's plumber's unit's illegal break-in at Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office. Ellsberg was an unlikely hero, a graduate of the Harvard University economics doctoral program, a former marine officer turned defense issue intellectual, a frequent visitor to Vietnam who was rankled by the distinct difference between what he was seeing and experiencing during his visits, on the one hand, and what the official American government position regarding what the situation was on the ground on the other.

Based on this growing dissatisfaction and the discovery of the so-called Pentagon papers, a treasure trove of more than 7,000 pages of carefully documented details about the U.S. Government's involvement in Vietnam and its motives, considerations, and actions, Ellsberg tried to enlist the support of a number of Senators and Congressmen in an effort to use the evidence in the Pentagon Papers to undercut the Government's position and thereby end the war itself. Failing to do so, he finally surrendered the documents to the New York Times, which agreed to publish them through a series of daily excerpts (and also later in an abridged best-selling paperback version). The Government tried to stop publication, but was denied the right to do so by the Supreme Court. Of course, with the publication came an increase in public opposition to the war and a recognition of the degree to which the Executive branch and the military had intentionally misled the public regarding the conduct of the war and the situation on the ground for more than 500,000 troops then stationed in-country. Still, it took more than five more years before the American involvement in Vietnam ended.

This is a wonderful book to experience, and in reading it one comes to recognize the formidable skills Ellsberg brings to bear in terms of his amazing recall, eye for details, and ability to successfully juggle a variety of interacting considerations at the same time. This guy is smarter than the average teddy bear, and it is easy to see how difficult a task it would have been for the Department of Defense and the nitwits over in the White House to try to outmaneuver him. I was a bit surprised at some of the personal revelations in the book, and while it is obvious that Mr. Ellsberg has a healthy ego, he manages for the most part to keep it at bay in retelling a story that could have easily have devolved in a retelling of the David against Goliath epic, but which he keeps objective and factual enough to keep the story rolling along as a recounting of the gripping events that transpired more than thirty years ago and helped to turn the tide of public opinion toward the war in Vietnam. I heartily recommend this book to anyone interested in 20th century American history. Enjoy!

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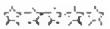
 **Everyone knows the secret except those reading the documents,** June 2, 2003

Reviewer: **toun (see more about me)** from Lanesville, Indiana USA
Daniel Ellsberg's service in Vietnam has been documented in other books, but his personal account is very informative. There are several true gems in this memoir, the most remarkable being the scene in which he personally warns Kissinger of the dangers of top secret access, this just prior to Kissinger's taking the National Security

Advisor position. Ellsberg warns the good Doctor that those with access to highly classified information go through a transformation process which eventually leads them to think that anyone without the same access is a simpleton not capable of judging policymakers. They stop listening to outsiders and eventually turn themselves into morons. A follow-up scene shows that Kissinger did fall victim to that syndrome at least on occasion. Perhaps the same may apply to Dan Ellsberg. He assumed that once the public saw what he saw in those "secret" papers the world would turn back on its axis. Ellsberg may not have realized that "the people" have always known the key secret -- the "great leader" will stop at nothing to remain in power and his men will do anything to keep their jobs. [See the final paragraph of David Chandler's book "Voices from S-21" for the best explanation I have seen about how men rationalize the evil they do by placing themselves in a "state of agency" to a bureaucracy to which they cling for survival.] The "secret" is as old as man himself, and never changes. Only those on the "inside" imagine themselves brilliant by virtue of their access to the details of age old political power schemes. The quotes from the Oval Office tapes of Nixon's "frank" reactions to Ellsberg's plot to publicize the McNamara study are wonderful, laughable, and a great joy to read. Would today's Oval Office tapes really be any less satisfying?

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 **Painfully Relevant**, April 18, 2003

TOP 500 Reviewer: www.stunning-reversal.com (see more about me) from Santa Monica

"Secrets" is Daniel Ellsberg's superb memoir detailing the period of his life from childhood to his acquittal of criminal charges for releasing the now famous Pentagon Papers. This book is a superb read on several levels. It is fascinating and important historical source, since Ellsberg participated in defense planning as a Rand researcher and as a Pentagon deputy during the critical period when the United States decided to occupy Vietnam. Equally as important is the ethical dilemma Ellsberg chronicles of having to choose between the safety and comfort of maintaining his bureaucratic sense of loyalty or making dangerous personal sacrifices for the greater good of his country and his conscience. And contrary to most political memoirs that are often tediously written and sprinkled with excessive namedropping, this book reads like a novel.

Dan Ellsberg began his career as a self-described cold warrior. Prior to obtaining a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard, Ellsberg served in the Marines as a peacetime company commander. After completing his graduate education he worked as a researcher in the Rand Institute where one of his projects involved estimating the total number of global casualties resulting from a nuclear exchange between the United States and Russia (hundreds of millions of people within the first twenty-four hours). Ellsberg undertook this work because since childhood he found the practice of civilian terror bombing, as he

understood it, to be morally repellant. Thus it should come as no surprise that when called to work in the Pentagon as the assistant to Assistant Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton, Ellsberg already brought a strong sense of moral purpose to the job, a situation that ultimately resulted in profound consequences both for him and for the government he served.

While serving in the Pentagon, Ellsberg witnessed the immediate confusion of the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Johnson Administration's subsequent decision to falsify the particulars of that incident as a pretext for invading Vietnam. Readers will probably be struck with the same sense of amazement that Ellsberg was about how America's military bureaucracy actually functions. From one perspective, Ellsberg was stunned by the sheer volume of crises that top officials including his boss and the president's cabinet, had to deal with in rapid succession. While Ellsberg admired his colleagues and superiors he often wondered if it was really possible to run a government by crisis hopping in this manner.

NO

From another perspective, Ellsberg was deeply disturbed by the standard policy of lying within the military bureaucracy. It may surprise readers to know that the military never had any illusions about the possibility of winning the Vietnam War. In 1964, according to Ellsberg, top military officials briefed the president and his cabinet with astonishing accuracy on the precise number soldiers required (1.5 million), for a specific duration of time (8 years), and a large number of resulting casualties (50,000) and no guarantee of victory. Despite such dire warnings, a sanguine and poorly defined policy was implemented, and when it quickly began to yield disastrous results the president and his top officials lied to each other and to the American people about what was really happening. While Ellsberg correctly concedes that there are many instances when it is practical for the highest levels of government to conceal information from the American people, he also observes a kind of bureaucratic pathology at work. Top officials including McNamara often provided favorable reports to the president, which they personally did not believe in and which they knew would result in disaster but which their positions and careers compelled them to do. As a result Ellsberg notes, the highest levels of government were not able learn from their mistakes in Vietnam and to adjust accordingly. Instead top officials developed what Ellsberg terms a process of systematic "anti-learning" which in layman's terms means that they saw what they wanted to see instead of what was actually happening.

Ellsberg's observation of the Pentagon and Executive Branch's process of systematic anti-learning was powerfully reinforced by his subsequent personal experience when he served as a State Department official in Vietnam. Ellsberg was brave enough and fortunate enough to traverse unsecured roads in hostile territory with the legendary civilian general, John Paul Vann. He witnessed both the plight of bogged down American soldiers and the resourcefulness of the determined Vietnamese guerillas and concluded that even if nuclear weapons were introduced, the war was ultimately unwinable. Ellsberg quickly concluded that America was faced with a war that its leaders had always known they could not win, that it was currently in the

process of losing, and which the highest levels of the military and government refused to view in realistic terms.

Ellsberg's opposition to the war took place gradually and culminated in the realization that America was in the process of destroying a generation of young men by sending them to war or imprisoning them for opposing the war. Shortly afterward, Ellsberg decided to risk a life sentence in prison by releasing the Pentagon papers to congress. The Pentagon papers are an astounding collection of documents both in their volume (several thousand papers) and in the frankness with which they make record the official process of lying to the American public. Many well-meaning congressional officials at first offered to produce the Pentagon papers to their colleagues on Ellsberg's behalf but ultimately declined for career reasons. Consequently Ellsberg released them to the media who subsequently disseminated them to the public.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants a first hand view of how the highest levels of American government work. Be warned, however, that while Ellsberg's story is ultimately worth knowing, his revelations about the government are frightening and depressing. It is interesting to note that in several public speeches ...Dan Ellsberg has frequently drawn parallels to his own experiences chronicled in this book, and to America's current foreign policy with respect to Iraq. Obviously this is an issue that readers must decide on their own, but if anything else, it makes "Secrets" a highly relevant book to read.

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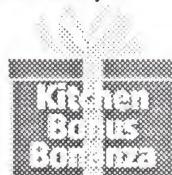
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"Secrets" is Daniel Ellsberg's superb memoir detailing the period of his life from childhood to his acquittal of criminal charges for releasing the now famous Pentagon Papers. This book is a superb read on several levels. It is fascinating and important historical source, since Ellsberg participated in defense planning as a Rand researcher and as a Pentagon deputy during the critical period when the United States decided to occupy Vietnam. Equally as important is the ethical dilemma Ellsberg chronicles of having to choose between the safety and comfort of maintaining his bureaucratic sense of loyalty or making dangerous personal sacrifices for the greater good of his country and his conscience. And contrary to most political memoirs that are often tediously written and sprinkled with excessive namedropping, this book reads like a novel.

Dan Ellsberg began his career as a self-described cold warrior. Prior to obtaining a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard, Ellsberg served in the Marines as a peacetime company commander. After completing his graduate education he worked as a researcher in the Rand Institute where one of his

projects involved estimating the total number of global casualties resulting from a nuclear exchange between the United States and Russia (hundreds of millions of people within the first twenty-four hours). Ellsberg undertook this work because since childhood he found the practice of civilian terror bombing, as he understood it, to be morally repellent. Thus it should come as no surprise that when called to work in the Pentagon as the **assistant to** Assistant Secretary of Defense John T. McNaughton, Ellsberg already brought a strong sense of moral purpose to the job, a situation that ultimately resulted in profound consequences both for him and for the government he served.

While serving in the Pentagon, Ellsberg witnessed the immediate confusion of the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the Johnson Administration's subsequent decision to falsify the particulars of that incident as a pretext for invading Vietnam. Readers will probably be struck with the same sense of amazement that Ellsberg was about how America's military bureaucracy actually functions. From one perspective, Ellsberg was stunned by the sheer volume of crises that top officials including his boss and the president's cabinet, had to deal with in rapid succession. While Ellsberg admired his colleagues and superiors he often wondered if it was really possible to run a government by crisis hopping in this manner.

From another perspective, Ellsberg was deeply disturbed by the standard policy of lying within the military bureaucracy. It may surprise readers to know that the military never had any illusions about the possibility of winning the Vietnam War. In 1964, according to Ellsberg, top military officials briefed the president and his cabinet with astonishing accuracy on the precise number soldiers required (1.5 million), for a specific duration of time (8 years), and a large number of resulting casualties (50,000) and no guarantee of victory. Despite such dire warnings, a sanguine and poorly defined policy was implemented, and when it quickly began to yield disastrous results the president and his top officials lied to each other and to the American people about what was really happening. While Ellsberg correctly concedes that there are many instances when it is practical for the highest levels of government to conceal information from the American people, he also observes a kind of bureaucratic pathology at work. Top officials including McNamara often provided favorable reports to the president, which they personally did not believe in and which they knew would result in disaster but which their positions and careers compelled them to do. As a result Ellsberg notes, the highest levels of government were not able learn from their mistakes in Vietnam and to adjust accordingly. Instead top officials developed what Ellsberg terms a process of systematic "anti-learning" which in layman's terms means that they saw what they wanted to see instead of what was actually happening.

Ellsberg's observation of the Pentagon and Executive Branch's process of systematic anti-learning was powerfully reinforced by his subsequent personal experience when he served as a State Department official in Vietnam. Ellsberg was brave enough and fortunate enough to traverse

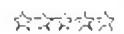
unsecured roads in hostile territory with the legendary civilian general, John Paul Vann. He witnessed both the plight of bogged down American soldiers and the resourcefulness of the determined Vietnamese guerillas and concluded that even if nuclear weapons were introduced, the war was ultimately unwinable. Ellsberg quickly concluded that America was faced with a war that its leaders had always known they could not win, that it was currently in the process of losing, and which the highest levels of the military and government refused to view in realistic terms.

Ellsberg's opposition to the war took place gradually and culminated in the realization that America was in the process of destroying a generation of young men by sending them to war or imprisoning them for opposing the war. Shortly afterward, Ellsberg decided to risk a life sentence in prison by releasing the Pentagon papers to congress. The Pentagon papers are an astounding collection of documents both in their volume (several thousand papers) and in the frankness with which they make record the official process of lying to the American public. Many well-meaning congressional officials at first offered to produce the Pentagon papers to their colleagues on Ellsberg's behalf but ultimately declined for career reasons. Consequently Ellsberg released them to the media who subsequently disseminated them to the public.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants a first hand view of how the highest levels of American government work. Be warned, however, that while Ellsberg's story is ultimately worth knowing, his revelations about the government are frightening and depressing. It is interesting to note that in several public speeches ...Dan Ellsberg has frequently drawn parallels to his own experiences chronicled in this book, and to America's current foreign policy with respect to Iraq. Obviously this is an issue that readers must decide on their own, but if anything else, it makes "Secrets" a highly relevant book to read.

Was this review helpful to you?

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful:

 **A life changer**, March 28, 2003

Reviewer: **m s lambard jr** from Foley, AL United States

Many have written more eloquently than I can about the contents of the book.

I am 62 and a veteran. I was a hometown fighter pilot in the Air National Guard in the 60s and 70s. I was, at the time, eager to go to Viet Nam and be a "real" fighter pilot. We were flying planes that were obsolete, even back then, and my unit was never called up. I look back on my eagerness for war as the folly of youth. I am now extremely thankful that I did not go.

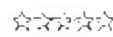
Mr. Ellsberg's book has changed my way of thinking about Viet Nam in particular, and my government in general. Realizing my delusions about the

execrable behavior of my government over generations has been a bitter discovery.

It is said that the truth will set you free. It doesn't say that this freedom will bring happiness. Having said that, I will still say "Thank you, Dr. Ellsberg". I recommend "Secrets" to all who seek the truth.

Was this review helpful to you?

11 of 13 people found the following review helpful:

 **Patriot**, March 19, 2003

Reviewer: **Michael Patton** ([see more about me](#)) from Montevallo, AL USA

I will start with a quote:

A popular government, without popular information or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or, perhaps, both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives.

James Madison, drafter of the first amendment

Once a self-described cold warrior, Daniel Ellsberg, a published expert in game theory who holds Harvard Ph.D. in Economics, has also been an analyst for the government and the Rand Corporation and, most significantly, the man who released the Pentagon Papers, which ultimately brought down the Nixon administration and forced the US out of Vietnam. In *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*, Daniel Ellsberg finally tells his story of one of the most important periods in US History and the central role he played in it.

Starting with his analysis of the Tonkin Gulf incidents, which led to the increased involvement of the US in Vietnam in 1961, Ellsberg leads the reader through an insider's tour of the intelligence community, the upper echelons of the administration and even the in-country conditions of Vietnam during the war. He does this on his way to explaining how he went from supporting the war as a way to prevent nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union to risking life in prison to leak the 7,000 pages of Top Secret documents that came to be known as the Pentagon Papers in a desperate attempt to stop the destruction both of US soldiers and the people and country of Vietnam. The Pentagon Papers themselves reveal the systematic deception of the American people about the scope of our actual and intended involvement in the Vietnam war, a history of deception which actually predates formal US involvement. *Secrets* reveals far more.

Secrets reads like a Tom Clancy novel in some respects: while the Nixon administration is ordering G. Gordon Liddy and the Watergate Plumbers to

steal confidential records from Ellsberg's psychoanalyst in California and to mount a physically debilitating attack on Ellsberg at a public appearance in Washington, Ellsberg and his friends are providing the New York Times and other newspapers with the Pentagon Papers. As subsequent newspapers are blocked by Justice Department injunctions from publishing what Ellsberg has provided them, Ellsberg and others courageously provide copies of the Top Secret documents to other media outlets.

One of the most disturbing revelations of *Secrets* is the lengths to which the US Government went to try to silence Ellsberg and to continue its known-to-be-futile efforts in Vietnam. John Mitchell, Nixon's Attorney General, even tried to override the 1st Amendment for the first time in history, filing an injunction against the New York Times and three other papers for printing the Pentagon Papers at all.

Aside from being an important historical document, *Secrets* is a nearly confessional look into the heart and soul of a man who risked all he had for the sake of the country he believed in. It is a tale of integrity and responsibility, in the face of overwhelming resistance and power and the threat of up to 115 years in federal prison, and a tale about a man who has indirectly affected the lives of every person in the country and our understanding of our own government.

Since I opened this review with a quote, it is fitting I should close with one. Hugo Black, writing for the majority of the Supreme Court, wrote these words, which apply to Daniel Ellsberg as surely as they apply to the newspaper who bought the lawsuit:

And paramount among the responsibilities of a free press is the duty to prevent any part of the government from deceiving the people and sending them off to distant lands to die of foreign fevers and foreign shot and shell. In my view, far from deserving condemnation for their courageous reporting, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and other newspapers should be commended for serving the purpose that the Founding Fathers saw so clearly.

Hugo Black, *New York Times Co. v United States*

Was this review helpful to you?

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful:

 **very timely**, February 25, 2003

Reviewer: **A reader** from Brooklyn, New York

This book is very important, very much worth your time. If you can't read it, listen to the audio tapes. As the US heads to war against Iraq a look back at Ellsberg's time in and around the Vietnam war are key. Ellsberg is a true American hero. Read it now!

Was this review helpful to you? [yes](#) [no](#)

19 of 21 people found the following review helpful:

Enlightening History, February 22, 2003

TOP 1000 Reviewer: [Patrick Devenny \(see more about me\)](#) from [Somerset, New Jersey](#)

Some of these reviews are ludicrous, and I would hope readers are not scared off the book by them. I, as a conservative, was a little leery about reading this book. Not that I have any respect for people like ultraliberal Lyndon Baines Johnson, but some of Ellsburg's more pacifistic tendencies made me a little worried about what I would read in this book. I did not know much about Ellsburg or his politics, but I was worried I would be reading a far left tract on the evils of any US action overseas. This is far from the case. Ellsburg does not reveal any secret government, or any other kind of leftist fantasy. Indeed, his real claims might be more disturbing.

Daniel Ellsburg was a very smart, former Marine officer. He was, and is, patriotic, and dedicated to the defeat of communism and tyranny. He quickly climbed the ladder of the US foreign policy power strata, ending up, in the early 60's, as aide to the Assistant Secretary of Defense, John McNaughton. At the time, the nation was slowly being drawn into the Vietnam War. The narration begins with quite the bang, as Ellsburg's first day at the Pentagon was also the day of the Tonkin Gulf Incident. Ellsburg was swamped with dozens of hysterical wire messages, giving a totally confusing image of the "attack". Soon after, however, Ellsburg realized, and let his superiors know, that the "incident" was most likely a misunderstanding and a mistake in communications. Then, as a reader, we are first introduced to the shroud of lies that clouded the eyes of most American policy makers of the era.

Ellsburg lays out his case very well. Even before the Tonkin Gulf Incident, people in the Johnson Administration were determined to start a war with North Vietnam, unbeknownst to the American people or Congress. Massive covert operations were carried out, with the full knowledge of the President and Secretary of Defense McNamara. Again, the lies covered any of this up. Later on, Ellsburg is tapped to write a history of how the US got involved in Vietnam. This was probably the most enlightening part of the book, as it showed many US policy makers and officials had tons of early doubts about involvement in Vietnam. Their warnings went unheeded. I felt, from reading the book, that no one could imagine the US would get so involved, then actually lose, so there was no need to "rock the boat". The effect of this was no one could be honest. LBJ would never entertain any negative reports, nor would McNamara and the military.

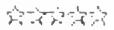
One of the things I had no idea about was Ellsburg's actual trip to Vietnam, where he worked with the legendary John Paul Vann. This was amazing, as Ellsburg took on some extremely dangerous missions. He quickly saw what

many others were reporting about. Because of the lack of any South Vietnamese leadership, and continuing American misunderstanding of the situation, the war was unwinnable. The worst part about this was that many trusted US sources were writing back to their superiors about the futility of the war, but no one would listen. Slowly, Ellsberg begins to realize that Presidents like Johnson and Nixon had no interest in actually telling the truth to the American people, and were more than willing to continue the massive coverup of the truth. Bravely, Ellsberg revealed a wealth of government documents to the New York Times, known as the Pentagon Papers. They documented the decades of American reports, describing the ultimate futility of the US presence in Vietnam. Of course, President Nixon and his cronies responded to this leak with their characteristic dirty tactics. Ellsberg almost went to jail for his bravery, but was later vindicated.

So what does the book teach us? Well, it teaches us that there must be strong public attention to government business. People like Johnson and McNamara, the two main "villains" of the book, could do whatever they wanted as long as the public did not care. Ellsberg does make a few statements I did not agree with, but overall, there is no doubt in my mind he is a brave man who loves his country, and was willing to put his life on the line to save it from an even more terrible disaster. This book does not condemn all government, or the US system, but it does argue for more oversight. Most people can agree on that, no matter what their political bent.

Was this review helpful to you?

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful:

 **Understanding Hidden American History**, February 7, 2003

Reviewer: **Robert B. Algie** from Rockford, IL USA

Like many others I was sucked into the Vietnam war against my will. I paid for what I thought was LBJ's war with my blood and sanity. What "SECRETS" does is to fill in the blanks with the background of the political agendas of a number of presidential administrations. "SECRETS" validates suspicions some of us have had for more than thirty years. "SECRETS" is the memoir of one person, Daniel

Ellsberg, who took a stand on the side of humanity and morality in an effort to end the Vietnam war and topple the corrupt and insatiable desire for ultimate power that would have been Richard M. Nixon's had it not been for the release of the Pentagon Papers.

"SECRETS" is a story of patriotism at its finest, where one man risked everything in an effort to disclose the truth about power and war conducted by the United States Government.

Reading "SECRETS" exposes war for what it really is, a manipulative tool of big business and government order.

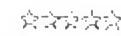
If more Americans would read this book they would become aware enough to argue whether or not we should ever engage in the brutality and ignorance of war again.

"SECRETS" should be required reading for anyone in America who believes him/herself to be a patriot.

Bob Algie

Was this review helpful to you? [yes](#) [no](#)

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful:

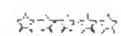
 **Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers**, February 5, 2003

Reviewer: **Beth Klopott** from Delmar, New York USA

This is one of the most important books about the Vietnam era. Dr. Ellsberg has demonstrated the need for citizens to be vigilant and never to take the word of government officials at face value. His exposure of the Pentagon Papers was, by far, one of the more patriotic actions of that time period.

Was this review helpful to you? [yes](#) [no](#)

11 of 13 people found the following review helpful:

 **An excellent, though maddening tale of government deceit**, January 25, 2003

Reviewer: **D. Michael Elkins (see more about me)** from Valrico, FL USA

This book should be read by everyone who responds to those polls saying that they support the current administration's efforts to involve our nation in another war with Iraq. Daniel Ellsberg laid his liberty on the line to disclose the government's deceit that got us into and kept us in the Vietnam quagmire. Only time will tell whether the government's efforts to deceive the public in the 1960's are currently being repeated, but it certainly makes you wonder when the current administration claims to have facts to justify a war, but is unwilling to disclose those facts for fear of putting certain operative's lives in danger. Unfortunately history repeats itself and the arrogance and disdain shown by our nation's leaders for the public in the 1960's is most likely being repeated in our own times. Where is the Daniel Ellsberg of today?

Was this review helpful to you? [yes](#) [no](#)

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful:

A memoir relevant to our times., January 23, 2003
Reviewer: [Emmet Kearney \(see more about me\)](#) from New York, NY
With this memoir (much like the Pentagon Papers themselves), Ellsberg offers to every citizen something that is deeply informative--an insider's look at those in powerful positions. And with this startling insight comes a warning.

Unlike others such as Chomsky or Vidal--who are reflexively dismissed by some as disconnected, ivory tower radicals--Ellsberg's account of government malfeasance gets its inescapable weight from its personnel nature. Ellsberg was there on the front lines of the cold war through most of the 50's and 60's. As a Marine, a Harvard educated analyst for The Rand Corporation and then the Pentagon, Ellsberg was part of the establishment that pursued an unjust war in Vietnam and lied about it to the American people.

This full reality was not completely apparent to him in his early years and like other dedicated "Cold Warriors" he kept his head down and rationalized that it was all for the best. He hoped that by making the government's decision-making abilities more effective, a more appropriate foreign policy would emerge. What he didn't realize was that for the men making the decisions, the process was as effective as they wanted it to be. He came to discover that these men were fully aware of the consequences of their policies. The problem was not that their decisions were corrupted by lack of information, but instead they were corrupted themselves by the institutions that bore them. The culture of these bodies fostered an arrogant belief that government needed to lie to the ignorant masses. Internal dissent was minimized and punished by an ardent allegiance to the hierarchy. The distance between the comfortable, safe offices where decisions were made and the far off countryside where those decisions spilled the blood of hundreds of thousands made human suffering peripheral to what they conceived to be the greater good. And this detachment ultimately lead to a top down decision-making process where desire and wishful thinking drove policies instead of facts from the ground below. All of these factors contributed to what Ellsberg identified as immoral policies that could only be corrected from outside the institutions that created them.

His super top-secret "Pentagon Papers" showed the folly of four consecutive administrations as they pursued a path that virtually all on the ground said was certain to fail. And despite Nixon's public claims to the contrary, Ellsberg knew that Nixon intended to continue on that path and in fact escalate the War further. Knowing that he was destroying his career and quite possibly giving up his freedom, Ellsberg published the Pentagon Papers in an attempt to put pressure on these institutions from the outside. If

anyone can tell us why government must be always questioned and monitored, Ellsberg can and does in this book.

This is a very engaging read because it is well written and clearly laid out by Ellsberg. One can see the mind of a top Pentagon analyst in the proficient examination of the relevant issues. If you like foreign affairs and politics this is a very good book for you. If not, you may find it dry and drawn out because as memoirs go, this one is rather unemotional. Ellsberg brings in some emotion at times (when himself and others are brought to tears by anguish over the war), but it seemed to me that the surrounding book did not explain that emotion. Although the emotional landscape of those times is not adequately explored, this observation is not a criticism since that is not the book's purpose. However, if the purpose of this book is to warn all citizens--in and out of government--of the corruptive force inherent in power, it is a success.

Was this review helpful to you? yes no

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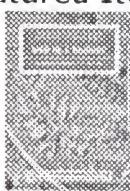
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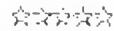
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 **Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers**, January 4, 2003
Reviewer: **A reader** from FL United States

(INTRODUCTION)

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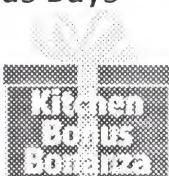
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The book is a must read. Per previous reviews, Daniel Ellsberg may have been a "little fish" with "the morals of a ferral cat," but the Pentagon Papers speak for themselves. It isn't and wasn't about Daniel Ellsberg. It's about the truth. Others may have "secretly opposed" the war as the book clearly documents, but no one stuck out their neck as Ellsberg did and that is the difference. McNaughton made his choice. Ellsberg made his.

Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

4 of 45 people found the following review helpful:

☆ **unseemly**, December 5, 2002

Reviewer: [A reader from Arlington, VA United States](#)
Ellsberg refers to the boss who protected him - a Mr. McNaughton - as "deceptive". I wonder how many who protected Mr Ellsberg came to use the same word.

Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

14 of 24 people found the following review helpful:

☆☆☆☆ **Poor, Poor Danny = a cheap personal attack**, November 29, 2002

Reviewer: [eightwheeldriver from Denver](#)

I did read the book and I believe it resonates today, with regard to the right wing Bush gang and their phony War on Terror and their phony War on Drugs. In "Secrets" Ellsberg shows us the secret, shadow government of the United States and gives us a glimpse of how a small group of unelected and unaccountable men manipulate our government for their own purposes. When caught out in the light of day, these men shrink in size...

Was this review helpful to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)

11 of 70 people found the following review helpful:

☆ **Poor, poor Danny**, November 25, 2002

Reviewer: [A reader from Arlington, VA USA](#)

I met Danny in 1971 when he spoke at St. Joseph's College in Philadelphia, invited by the Theology Dept. no less, even though he was an admitted thief and oath breaker. He was quite nervous, and very defensive, especially when I dropped the names of some of the people that he had worked with at the Pentagon, including my father, who was his boss for a short time after he was fired by John T. McNaughton, or "re-assigned" as he put it in his book, after he viewed McNaughton's personal "Eye's Only" file. About 1969 or

maybe '70, I remember a dinner party at our house where his name was mentioned by my father, and as the various guests who all knew him talked about his marriage to Barbara Marx, which seemed to impress them, they all had their little Danny stories, which tended to focus on finding something for him to do. He was late with his assignments, or didn't do them, sometimes coming to my father for help at the last minute. He was thought to be unstable, and "headed for a nervous breakdown." This was BEFORE the Pentagon Papers made him a household name.

Everybody needs to realize that he was a little fish, relegated to do busy work, and had the morals of an ferral cat. What the book fails to mention, besides the names of the people who really worked with him and had his number, like Roger Mandelstam, and Bill Smith, was that his former boss McNaughton who secretly opposed the buildup in Viet Nam, and whose confidence he betrayed, was killed mysteriously as the military plane he was riding in took off, and to the best of my knowledge, has never been investigated at all.

Now there might be an interesting story.

Was this review helpful to you?

2 of 17 people found the following review helpful:

☆☆☆☆ Ah, the kiss of death is nigh, November 24, 2002

Reviewer: Bruce P. Barten (see more about me)

Daniel Ellsberg has the privilege of being both the Quisling and anti-Quisling for those in American society who were concerned about the responsibilities of government in the 20th century. Philosophically, American foreign policy was the area in which people were most likely to become early illustrations of the final sentence of Section 354 of THE GAY SCIENCE by Friedrich Nietzsche:

We simply have no organ for knowing, for 'truth': we 'know' (or believe and imagine) exactly as much as is useful to the human herd, to the species: and even what is here called 'usefulness' is finally also just a belief, a fiction, and perhaps just that supremely fatal stupidity of which we some day will perish.

Quisling was Norway's perfect Nazi in the way that the Saigon government was always the perfect forerunner of democracy as far as American policy ("just a belief, a fiction, and perhaps" just what Nietzsche wrote) was concerned. The assumption that people in South Vietnam, after 1954, when their (SVN) government was largely determined by what the United States was willing to impose or maintain, would be willing to die so their future might improve was as obvious to those who find the kiss of death the ultimate test in logic as Quisling's belief that people in Norway would not die if the government of Norway welcomed the Germans instead of attempting to fight an invasion. Each policy was supported by factions in the U.S. government. President Kennedy preferred to maintain the fiction that Saigon's government was a perfect Quisling, so Americans should assume

nice { that any American would be as safe in South Vietnam as German officials might feel entitled to safety in Norway during World War II. The anti-Quisling factor never really accepted the idea of Quisling as an ideal ally.
 ? { The original Quisling was a Nazi, after all, and allowing anyone else the opportunity to die for our freedom was not the kiss of death, as far as they were concerned.

An outline of Ellsberg's book, SECRETS, splitting the factions as they appear in particular settings, might turn out like:

? I. Preface, Ellsberg alone, "carrying a briefcase filled with top secret documents," (p. VII) determined to show that American policy was "just a belief, a fiction, and perhaps just" (what Nietzsche wrote) as secret as Quisling's plans to topple the government of Norway at the right time for the Germans. Ellsberg, acting in secret, is practically Quisling himself, without actually being a Nazi.

Part 1, Prologue: Vietnam 1961, the view "that under President Ngo Dinh Diem, the dictatorial leader we had essentially chosen for South Vietnam seven years earlier, the Communists would almost surely take power eventually, probably within a year or two." (p. 3) This shows how Quisling politics works when everyone knows that the next Quisling would be worse. ". . . the Communists would probably win even faster. His reasoning was informed and complex; my notes of our discussion are filled with diagrams of 'vicious circles,' a whole network of them. It was persuasive." The view of the anti-Quisling prospects, "But even American divisions, this colonel believed, would only postpone the outcome. The Communists would govern soon after our forces left, whenever that might be." (p. 4). This ultimately made any American policy "finally also just a belief, a fiction, and perhaps just that supremely fatal stupidity of which" Nietzsche wrote.

Chapter 1, The Tonkin Gulf: August 1964: The message, "Am under continuous torpedo attack," (p. 7) was just what anti-Quisling factors like LBJ needed to impress Americans with how brave bombers from Navy aircraft carriers could invade enemy airspace at will to impose reprisals for stunts like "Herrick reported another torpedo had run by him, and two more were in the water." (p. 7). "Torpedoes missed. Another fired at us. Four torpedoes in water. And five torpedoes in water." (p. 9). Ellsberg could determine, based on "In my new job I was reading the daily transcripts of this secret testimony, and at the same time I was learning from cables, reports, and discussion in the Pentagon the background that gave the lie to virtually everything told both to the public and, more elaborately, to Congress in secret session." (p. 13). As far as South Vietnam acting as our Quisling, Ellsberg learned that covert raids attacking North Vietnam had just taken place, and "these weren't South Vietnamese operations at all, not even joint operations. They were entirely U.S. operations, code-named 34A ops." (p. 14). In the realm of "their illegality, the danger both of exposure and of escalation, and their covertness, defined as 'plausible deniability'--" (p. 15) South Vietnam as Quisling was only the cover story for what

America was doing in a way that was altogether improper.

For a lot of people, American involvement in Vietnam was the kiss of death for American foreign policy, and no one is as qualified to tell that story as well as Daniel Ellsberg can and does in this book. The philosophy of Nietzsche might be considered an unusual personal choice for attempting to communicate how American policy was supposed to be more important than multiple young American lives at the time. I haven't read enough philosophy to find another famous theory that could come as close to my view of Nam.

...

Was this review helpful to you? [yes](#) [no](#)

8 of 12 people found the following review helpful:

☆☆☆☆☆ **Must reading**, November 20, 2002

Reviewer: **A reader** from St. Thomas, VI United States
A primer on how presidents and their administrations lie to the American public.

Was this review helpful to you? [yes](#) [no](#)

12 of 18 people found the following review helpful:

☆☆☆☆☆ **Excellent book. real issue, questionable perspective**, November 7, 2002

Reviewer: **A reader** from Irving, TX United States
Read the five star reviews: Everthing they say about the quality of the writing, the suspence, the detail and the ultimate importance of the Pentagon Papers is true. As a veteran of both the war and, later, the anti-war movement, I could not be more pleased that the Pentagon Papers came to light and the futility of the Vietnam War was finally made clear. ...The truth is the tragic story of the Vietnam War and the muddled decision making that got us there and kept us there. The fiction is that Daniel Ellsberg is a hero.

Was this review helpful to you? [yes](#) [no](#)

37 of 41 people found the following review helpful:

☆☆☆☆☆ **History Matters, Secrecy Permits War Crimes by Presidents**, November 2, 2002

TOP 100 Reviewer: **Robert D. Steele (see more about me)** from Oakton, VA United States

This extraordinary work comes at the perfect time, as an Administration is seeking to create new forms of secret operations invisible to Congress and the public, in pursuit of its war on Iraq and-one speculates-other targets of ideological but not public priority. The book covers seven areas I categorize as Background, History, Information Strategy, Pathology of Secrecy, Ethics, War Crimes, and Administrative.

By way of background, the book establishes that the author was not a peacenik per se, as some might perceive him, but rather a warrior, both in terms of Cold War ideology and from actual experience as a USMC infantry company commander and an on-the-ground observer traveling across Viet-Nam by jeep instead of helicopter, generally in the company of the top U.S. ground expert in Viet-Nam, John Paul Vann. The book establishes-as George Allen has also told us in NONE SO BLIND, that intelligence did not fail in Viet-Nam, that Presidents do get good advice from good men, but

| that the position of President, combined with executive secrecy as an enabling condition, permits very irrational and ineffective policies, conceived in private without public debate, to go forward at taxpayer expense and without Congressional oversight. The author is timely in emphasizing that the "spell of unanimity" is very dangerous and provides a very false image to the public-the stifling of dissent and debate at all levels leads to bad policy.

The author does an effective job of bringing forward the lessons of history, not only from Truman and Eisenhower forward, but from the Japanese and French occupations of Indochina. We failed to learn from history, and even our own experts, such as Lansdale showing McNamara the rough equipment that the Vietnamese would defeat us with because of their "will to win," were sidelined.

As a public administration and public policy text this book offers real value as a primary source. The author provides valuable insights into how quickly "ground truth" can be established; on how the U.S. Government is not structured to learn; on how the best answers emerge when there is not a lead agency and multiple inputs are solicited simultaneously; and most importantly, on how private truths spoken in secrecy are not effective within any Administration. The author stresses that Americans must understand what Presidents are doing in their name, and not be accomplices to war crimes or other misdeeds. He does a brilliant job of demonstrating why we cannot let the Executive Branch dictate what we need to know.

Interwoven with the author's balanced discussion of how to get ground truth right is his searing and intimate discussion of the pathology of secrecy as an enabler for bad and sometimes criminal foreign policy, carried out without public debate or Congressional oversight. The author adds new insights, beyond those in Morton Halperin's superb primer on Bureaucracy and Foreign Policy, regarding the multiple levels of understanding created by multiple levels of classification; the falseness of many written records in an

yes!

environment where truth may often only be spoken verbally, without witnesses; the fact that the Department of Defense created false records to conceal its illegal bombings in Laos and Cambodia, at the same time that the White House created false secret cables, used Acting Director of the FBI Patrick Gray to destroy evidence, and sought to bribe a judge with the offer of the FBI directorship. The author presents a compelling portrait of an Executive Branch-regardless of incumbent party-likely to make major foreign policy miscalculations because of the pathology of secret compartmentation, while also being able to conceal those miscalculations, and the cost to the public, because of Executive secrecy. He is especially strong on the weakness of secret information. As he lectured to Kissinger: "The danger is, you'll become like a moron. You'll become incapable of learning from most people in the world, no matter how much experience they have in their particular areas that may be much greater than yours" [because of your blind faith in the value of your narrow and often incorrect secret information. P. 236]

On such a foundation, the author discusses the ethics of Presidential leadership. He is especially strong-and relevant today-in discussing how Presidential appointees regard loyalty to the President as a mandate for lying to Congress and the media and the public. The author excels at bringing forward how our corruption in permitting corruption is easily recognized and interpreted by indigenous personnel-just as how whom we support is quick evidence of how little we know about local politics.

From here the author segues into the ethics of collateral damage and the liability of the American people for war crimes and naked aggression against the Vietnamese because of our deliberate violation of the Geneva accords and our support for a corrupt series of dictatorships in South Viet-Nam. Much of what we did in Viet-Nam would appear to qualify for prosecution under the International Tribunal, and it may be that our bi-partisan history of war crimes in Viet-Nam is what keeps us from acknowledging the inherent wisdom of accepting the jurisdiction of the International Tribunal in future wars. Tellingly, at one point his wife reads the Pentagon Papers and her tearful reaction is: "this is the language of torturers."

Administratively we are reminded that the Pentagon Papers were 7,000 pages in total; that Neil Sheehan from The New York Times actually stole a set of the papers from Ellsberg before being given a set; that character assassination by the U.S. Government is a routine tactic in dealing with informed dissent; and that it is not illegal to leak classified information-only administrative sanctions apply, outside a narrow set of Congressionally-mandated exceptions.

This book is a "must read" for any American that thinks and votes.

Was this review helpful to you? yes no

8 of 102 people found the following review helpful:

Still a Jerk, October 20, 2002

Reviewer: **A reader** from Covington, LA USA

Ellsberg's claim to fame is that he stole a government report about Vietnam from the Pentagon, and delivered copies to the New York Times and the Washington Post. For the last 30 years, he has been taking victory laps for that criminal act. His book is an argument that he and his partner, Anthony Russo, are as important to America as the Founding Fathers. The photos in the book are overwhelming evidence of Ellsberg's narcissism. Although he was a minor character at best in Vietnam, he pretends to be the focus of attention. His book is good in one respect: it reveals the self-righteousness of anti-war activists. Don't waste your money on this book.

Was this review helpful to you?

27 of 32 people found the following review helpful:

A must buy!, October 17, 2002

Reviewer: **Eleanor LeCain** from Washington, D.C. USA

Daniel Ellsberg offers critical insights into how men in power can lead the United States into tragic war with unexpected and catastrophic consequences. A must read for every American as Bush pushes us to war in Iraq.

Was this review helpful to you?

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All Ellsberg would want you to know, October 16, 2002

By Harris Schmitz

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Reviewer: **Bruce P. Barten** ([see more about me](#)) from Saint Paul, MN United States

One of the photographs in this book shows Ellsberg, with the rapt attention of 14 children, holding a scarf. The caption says, "My knack for magic tricks always worked with kids in Vietnam." It is on the same page as a picture of "Randy Kehler giving the talk at Haverford College on August 28, 1969, that opened my eyes to the possibilities of resisting war." The big question, who looks less like a fool? 14 kids who don't know what is going on, or the portrait of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) on the wall behind Randy, or Ellsberg having lunch with Henry Kissinger at San Clemente in August 1970, after Kissinger complemented Ellsberg on the Lowell Lecture series, "The Art of Coercion" which Ellsberg had given to Kissinger's seminar at Harvard in 1959, when Ellsberg got to explain Hitler: "Hitler had deliberately cultivated among his adversaries the impression of his own irrational unpredictability. He couldn't be counted on not to carry out a threat to do something crazy, mutually destructive." (p. 344).

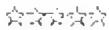
Secret activities generate an aura, THOU SHALT NOT ADMIT, which Daniel Ellsberg's book, SECRETS, is all about. Early in the book, on pages 7 to 20, the cable traffic of August 4, 1964, from Captain John J. Herrick in the Gulf of Tonkin, is explained as Ellsberg attempted to figure out what it meant from the Pentagon. The information provided is far less complete than in TONKIN GULF AND THE ESCALATION OF THE VIETNAM WAR by Edwin E. Moise, which analyzed the radar "skunks" picked up by the destroyers and the confusion caused by their inability to decide whether there had been three or five '(The fact that "N," "O," and "P" never got within twenty miles of the destroyers has been downplayed or completely ignored by most of the authors who have interpreted these skunks as North Vietnamese PT boats waiting in ambush for the destroyers.)' (Moise, p. 120). Mostly I think Ellsberg is wrong, as information coming from the government is typically wrong in ways that will protect intelligence gathering sources and methods, which really tried to maintain the illusion that everything the North Vietnamese had done had been unprovoked. I don't believe "intercepted North Vietnamese cables supposedly confirming an August 4 attack actually referred to the attack on August 2." (Ellsberg, p. 10). It seems far more likely to me that North Vietnamese cables confirming an attack on August 4 actually referred to a covert OPLAN 34A maritime operation 70 miles from the Maddox and the Turner Joy, about which McNamara testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1968, "that the President had announced publicly on 3 August that our patrol would continue and consist of two destroyers. It is difficult to believe, in the face of that announcement, and its obvious purpose of asserting our right to freedom of the seas, that even the North Vietnamese could connect the patrol of the Maddox and the Turner Joy with ... action taking place some 70 miles away." (Moise, pp. 104-5). The secret circus stunt interpretation that I'm inclined to believe was that it was American intelligence which, interpreting cable intercepts of North Vietnamese reactions to the covert operation, convinced Captain Herrick 70 miles away that he was about to be attacked.

Ellsberg's book, *SECRETS*, has an index which lists a lot of people and incidents, but I found it a bit confusing on the major questions of our lifetimes. Checking out "Kennedy, John F.: assassination of, 194, 272," the emotional outpourings on pages listed seem to apply more to Bobby than to JFK. "Being his own man in the Senate after losing his brother, and with his father disabled, must have had a lot to do with it." (p. 194) He quotes Bobby on Nam, "We didn't want to lose in Vietnam or get out. We wanted to win if we could. But my brother was determined never to send ground combat units to Vietnam." (pp. 194-5). A lot of people concerned about Nam in 1961, when the number of American military troops assigned there started to increase into the thousands, had trouble seeing a distinction between advisers and soldiers actually taking part in a war, and the distinction was not that American troops would only fire if they were fired upon. On the other assassinations in November, 1963, Ellsberg wrote:

Lansdale left Vietnam, and Diem and his brother were eventually assassinated in a U.S.-authorized coup, in which, ironically, Lansdale's former CIA team member Lucien Conein was the liaison between the coup plotters and the American ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, who strongly favored the coup. (p. 99).

Was this review helpful to you?

86 of 90 people found the following review helpful:

 **Spellbinding Recounting Of The Pentagon Papers Story!**, October 10, 2002

TOP 10 Reviewer: Barron Laycock (Labradorman) (see more reviews about me) from Temple, NH USA

After finding this book quite by accident while browsing through the wonderful Concord bookstore the other day, I was astounded to find how relevant and interesting a story author Daniel Ellsberg manages to conjure up after all this time regarding his legendary experience leading up to and including the leaking, release and publication of the infamous "Pentagon Papers" by the New York Times. As he explains early in the long yet fascinating monologue, he fully expected to be sentenced to a long prison sentence for having secreted a copy of the highly classified Department of Defense's official history of the American Government's policy and involvement in Vietnam. The report was a damning confirmation of the worst fears of the anti-war movement, and provided overwhelming evidence of the cynical, manipulative, and deceitful character of our government and its deceit to its own people regarding its involvement.

What surprised Ellsberg most in all of this swirling excitement and activity was his own growing celebrity, and while he spent years fearing the worst for his own admitted culpability in defying criminal statutes by stealing and leaking official government secrets, eventually the charges against him were

dropped based, among other things, on the revelations of the Nixon's plumber's unit's illegal break-in at Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office. Ellsberg was an unlikely hero, a graduate of the Harvard University economics doctoral program, a former marine officer turned defense issue intellectual, a frequent visitor to Vietnam who was rankled by the distinct difference between what he was seeing and experiencing during his visits, on the one hand, and what the official American government position regarding what the situation was on the ground on the other.

Based on this growing dissatisfaction and the discovery of the so-called Pentagon papers, a treasure trove of more than 7,000 pages of carefully documented details about the U.S. Government's involvement in Vietnam and its motives, considerations, and actions, Ellsberg tried to enlist the support of a number of Senators and Congressmen in an effort to use the evidence in the Pentagon Papers to undercut the Government's position and thereby end the war itself. Failing to do so, he finally surrendered the documents to the New York Times, which agreed to publish them through a series of daily excerpts (and also later in an abridged best-selling paperback version). The Government tried to stop publication, but was denied the right to do so by the Supreme Court. Of course, with the publication came an increase in public opposition to the war and a recognition of the degree to which the Executive branch and the military had intentionally misled the public regarding the conduct of the war and the situation on the ground for more than 500,000 troops then stationed in-country. Still, it took more than five more years before the American involvement in Vietnam ended.

This is a wonderful book to experience, and in reading it one comes to recognize the formidable skills Ellsberg brings to bear in terms of his amazing recall, eye for details, and ability to successfully juggle a variety of interacting considerations at the same time. This guy is smarter than the average teddy bear, and it is easy to see how difficult a task it would have been for the Department of Defense and the nitwits over in the White House to try to outmaneuver him. I was a bit surprised at some of the personal revelations in the book, and while it is obvious that Mr. Ellsberg has a healthy ego, he manages for the most part to keep it at bay in retelling a story that could have easily have devolved in a retelling of the David against Goliath epic, but which he keeps objective and factual enough to keep the story rolling along as a recounting of the gripping events that transpired more than thirty years ago and helped to turn the tide of public opinion toward the war in Vietnam. I heartily recommend this book to anyone interested in 20th century American history. Enjoy!

Was this review helpful to you?

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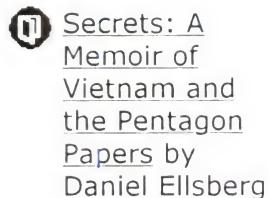
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Excellent source material for my paper., March 31, 2003

Reviewer: richeeboy ([see more about me](#)) from Lake Oswego, OR United States

I won't go into how detailed this book is, as others have already done so. Let it suffice that this book was invaluable in a paper I was writing for my recent world history class. A big thanks to the author!!

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15 of 18 people found the following review helpful:

How Saddam Hussein came to be so powerful in the first place, February 1, 2003

Reviewer: Todd Altman ([see more about me](#)) from Ohio

This is a must-read book for anyone who doubts the legitimacy of the upcoming war on Iraq. Exhaustively researched, it provides an all-important historical context within which to judge the pro-war rhetoric of the Bush administration.

There are countless examples I could cite in support of this assessment. Here is one that is sure to make your blood boil.

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On page 8, author Alan Friedman notes that:

"Since 1979, Iraq had been on the State Department's list of states identified as sponsors of terrorism."

Then, on page 19, he reveals that:

"On February 26, 1982, the Reagan administration told Congress that it had dropped Iraq from the list of nations that supported acts of international terrorism. Before coming to Baghdad, [Fred] Haobsh had read about the move and the complaints from senators about Congress not being properly consulted ahead of time. The State department had made it clear that taking Iraq off the list of terrorist nations did not mean the United States was lifting its ban on arms shipments to Iraq. Little was said, however, about the significant hidden value of the change in Iraq's status: Baghdad would now be eligible for American government loan guarantees. The decision in Washington was more important than people like Fred Haobsh could have realized. To covert operators like Johnson and Smith, it was a signal that they now had political cover to go ahead with their plans to provide U.S. equipment to Iraq, albeit by way of unofficial channels" (p. 19).

The result of these U.S. taxpayer-guaranteed loans was, of course, "Iraq-gate" (which the media now pretends never happened).

So the Reagan-Bush administration (with Bush, a former CIA director, playing a pivotal role) helped arm Iraq **after** it had already been identified years earlier as a sponsor of terrorism.

If that wasn't bad enough, consider the following excerpt from page 134:

"While many saw evidence that Baghdad was no less a menace than before, Bush and Baker wanted to emphasize the positive. So on Monday, October 2, 1989, with all the necessary information available to him, President George Bush lifted a pen and with one stroke set in motion a secret presidential policy to help Saddam. He signed his name to a secret order that would become known by the acronym of NSD 26, for National Security Directive 26. (See Appendix B, pages 320-322)."

"'When you look at NSD 26, you find out it was the Administration's sole desire and policy to aid and abet Saddam Hussein,' said Congressman Sam Gejdenson, a Connecticut Democrat who became one of Bush's harshest critics. 'The cop was put in the intersection, and he was waving the sellers on.'"

Why is that excerpt so significant? Because Bush Sr. did this long **after** Saddam Hussein supposedly "gassed his own people."

Now we have Bush Sr.'s son, in a shameless display of mind-boggling hypocrisy, using this 15-year-old gassing incident as a pretext for the upcoming slaughter of Iraqi peasants. The hollowness of this pretext is so painfully obvious, that it has provoked an unprecedented level of

anti-war activism *before* the war in question has even started.

What's worse is that there are millions of people in this country who, when presented with these facts, immediately throw a tantrum and start mindlessly accusing the messenger of being "anti-American." In the sense that "America" denotes a moral commitment to the universal principles of truth and justice, it is *they* who are "anti-American."

...

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2 of 22 people found the following review helpful:

Short on facts, long on speculation, November 14, 2002

Reviewer: **A reader** from Seattle, WA

This book should be moved to the fiction category. It's long on speculation and very, very short on facts. What is passed off as fact does not hold up under the scrutiny of a good fact checker.

Was this review helpful to you? [yes](#) [no](#)

39 of 40 people found the following review helpful:

Dr. Frankenstein Creates a Monster; the U.S. Arms Saddam, March 13, 2001

Reviewer: **Philip Greenspan (see more about me)** from Spring Valley, New York United States

An appropriate metaphor. But in defense of Dr. Frankenstein - he was attempting to advance science and did not know that his experiment would produce the abominable creature that resulted. When the U.S. government clandestinely - with junior partners Britain and Italy and bit players, France, Germany, and Japan - provided Saddam Hussein with sophisticated military high tech weapons and biological and chemical warfare items it was well aware of what a despicable tyrant he was.

"Spider's Web" exposes a deplorable sub rosa world that was created in order to supply Saddam Hussein armaments during the Iran-Iraq war. Presidents Reagan and Bush pursued policies in direct contravention of existing law and of their own public statements.

It was no secret that Saddam was a despicable character, who--among innumerable criminal acts--was not averse to murdering his own people--the Kurds, with poison gas.

War had erupted between Iran and the Iraq, two countries both considered enemies of the US. Iran having overthrown the Shah and in the process humiliated the U.S. was judged to be the greater evil.

Accordingly-while contending that it was neutral-the U.S. tilted to Iraq and Saddam. William Casey, head of the CIA at the time, was the strongest proponent of assistance to Saddam. He did not just tilt but in the vernacular "gave away the store".

In Europe, Margaret Thatcher was a strong advocate for strengthening Iraq, as was the Italian government. Other governments, namely France, Germany and Japan, did not want to miss out on good commercial possibilities and joined in. Some also sold to the Iranians. All except the U.S. and England dropped out when Iraq did not pay its bills.

Many in the White House and in the State, Treasury, Defense, Commerce, and Agriculture Departments were shocked and firmly opposed to this policy. But in both the Reagan and Bush administrations a green light for Saddam's purchases permitted him to create a formidable high-tech military machine. Sales of almost any items were permitted including components for atomic, biological, and chemical weapons. There were even instances where the CIA would purchase Russian equipment in the Eastern European black market to service his existing Russian equipment!

All of these activities were in direct violation of existing laws and regulations relating to the transfer of military equipment. Various subterfuges were developed such as sales to Saudi Arabia and Jordan. These countries then transferred what they received to Iraq. To pay for this equipment Iraq obtained loans guaranteed by the federal government. What was unique about the loans is that they were arranged by the Agriculture Department. Iraq was buying American food, then reselling it at a profit, and using the proceeds to purchase armaments.

Numerous ordinary individuals who happened to be in the right place at the right time (or perhaps in the wrong place at the right time) were drawn into the periphery of this nefarious operation. A salesman who spoke Arabic and worked for a supplier; a trucker who hauled British supplies to Europe and the Middle East; a banker at an Atlanta bank that processed all the loans. Each profited from the arrangements but all eventually grew wary of the operation and eventually suffered for their involvement.

President Bush and James Baker were actively pushing their pro-Iraq policy, in the summer of 1989, when these undercover operations began to unravel. Two employees at the Atlanta bank reported some of the suspicious activities that had occurred there prompting the U.S. attorney in Atlanta to investigate.

When Saddam invaded Kuwait the policy was suddenly reversed. Saddam became "Hitler"; and the White House now embarked upon a cover up-but too late-the clandestine operations were leaking out.

Henry Gonzalez, head of the House Banking Committee, pressed for public hearings. The Justice Department objected-the Atlanta investigation would be jeopardized-sensitive national security concerns.

The Commerce Department's top export official was fired when he appeared before the committee and told the truth.

An independent counsel friendly to the administration was hired whose findings provided a whitewash of the affair. But loose ends still remained. The government tried to resolve the Atlanta case by making the bank manager the fall guy for the entire operation. So many peculiarities had occurred in the pretrial and Congressional hearings that Judge Marvin Shoob in an extraordinary ruling blasted the government's handling of the case.

The book provides ample notes of sources to support the statements. In addition there are three appendices of actual relevant documents.

What conclusions can we draw. Two presidents knowingly violated their oath of office. They defied critically important laws dealing with the national defense of the country. They armed, with the most sophisticated weapons, a rogue state, a potential enemy, a country that did in fact become an enemy and has been embargoed in order to remove those armaments.

It is unfortunate that a scandal of such monumental proportions did not get proper news coverage. The cover up was not 100 per cent effective. But the news media which continually exploits an O. J., a Princess Diana, or an Elian story for days on end on the front page or as the lead item on television and radio gives this major scandal scant coverage.

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From Publishers Weekly

For much of the 1980s, BNL-Atlanta, a branch of the giant Italian-owned Banca Nazionale del Lavoro of Rome, helped finance exports to Iraq from the U.S. and other Western nations. BNL-Atlanta's first involvement in underwriting exports began with foodstuffs but quickly progressed to other products, including military weapons. Although most Western governments forbade arms trading with Iraq, the U.S. winked at the BNL-Atlanta operation, as did BNL executives in New York City and Rome. When the scheme finally became public, government prosecutors as well as BNL officials tried to place the blame on the Atlanta branch manager, Christopher Drogoul. Mantius, a reporter for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, does yeoman service in sorting out the complex tale, in which nearly every party involved, including numerous U.S. government agencies, was looking to protect its own interests at the expense of the truth. And the sad fact, according to Mantius, is that most of those responsible for the illegal arms trading supported by the BNL loans escaped unscathed.

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From Library Journal

This is an intriguing account of one of the major foreign policy scandals in recent American politics. The author, an investigative reporter for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, describes in riveting detail how the Atlanta branch of Italy's Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL) acted as a front for channeling illegal funds to arm Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1980s. The key role played by Christopher Drogoul, the manager of BNL-Atlanta, in

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facilitating transfer of funds to Iraq is highlighted throughout the book. Mantius also reveals the intricate relationships among various U.S. government agencies, the Italian government, and the BNL in laundering funds to bolster Saddam Hussein's ambitions in the Persian Gulf. An accessible treatment; recommended for both general and informed readers.? Nader Entessar, Spring Hill Coll., Mobile, Ala.
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From Booklist

Since Watergate, it seems that the press has no need or desire to cut the president of the U.S. any slack in terms of investigating and publishing presidential wrongdoing or errors in judgment. Here, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reporter Mantius presents the disturbing story of U.S. political complicity that came to be known as Iraqgate. Despite Iraq's status as a terrorist nation, the Reagan administration made overtures to the Iraqis, mostly because they were at war with Iran. The Iraqis, desperate for weapons, welcomed the attention. The Bush White House continued the relationship, helping the Iraqis to receive new weapons and the technology to make more, right up until Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. To help fund their war machine, the Iraqis received illegal loans through the Atlanta branch of an Italian bank, Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, or BNL. The Atlanta BNL was run by Christopher Drogoul, who would later insist that the Bush administration knew of his off-the-book loans to Iraq and gave its implicit approval--a point that Mantius' meticulous documentation makes difficult to refute. Another troubling look at presidential fiat and the ensuing cover-ups that necessarily follow. *Brian McCombie*

From Book News, Inc.

Investigates how the Atlanta, Georgia, branch of Italy's government- owned bank, Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (BNL), provided Saddam Hussein with billions to build weapons and destroy stability in the Middle East, and demonstrates how the BNL operation fit into the Reagan and Bush administrations' efforts to enlist Saddam as a trading partner and political ally. Includes b&w photos. Annotation copyright Book News, Inc. Portland, Or.

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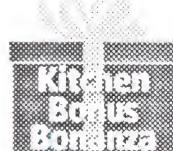
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